



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE EXCITING FORCE IN THE DRAMA.

Every drama has one or more exciting moments or forces. The purpose of this paper is to determine the nature, function, and position of the principal exciting force of a drama. Various definitions of this force have been offered from time to time, but the most important of these definitions contain obscure or conflicting elements. They do not agree as to either the function or the position of the force. In some of these there is even a confounding of the exciting force with the exciting cause of the action. It is my purpose, then, to attempt to clear up the obscurities and separate and distinguish the conflicting elements.

I shall take up, first, some of the definitions of the exciting moment as given by the different authorities on the subject. A. W. Schlegel, in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, pp. 240-42 (Bohn's translation), several times makes use of the term 'first determination' or simply 'determination' as the beginning of the action. He speaks of the "determination of Oedipus to discover and punish the murderer of Laius; the pious 'resolve' of Antigone to bury her brother; Brutus' great 'resolve,' and so on. . . . The absolute beginning of an ancient tragedy is the assertion of free-will." Thus it is seen that Schlegel incidentally considers the beginning of the action as an act of volition, and this is the exciting force of the action.

In his *Technique of the Drama*, Gustav Freytag is more explicit and attempts various definitions of the dramatic exciting moment. Some of these definitions are very clear, but others are obscure and even contradictory. On p. 115 (MacEwan's translation), Freytag indicates accurately the nature and position of the exciting moment, when he says that "Between the [five parts of a drama] stand three important scenic effects, through which the parts are separated as well as bound together. Of these three dramatic moments or crises one, which indicates the beginning of the stirring action, stands between the introduction and the rise. It is called the exciting moment or force." Again on p. 121, in speaking of the element of volition necessary to the beginning of the excited action, he says that "in *Julius Cæsar* this impel-

ling force is the thought of killing Cæsar," and that "in *Othello* it is the agreement between Iago and Roderigo to separate the Moor and Desdemona."

Some of Freytag's illustrations, however, do not illustrate, as in *Clavigo*, the arrival of Beaumarchais at his sister's is said to be the exciting force. There is certainly no act of will in a mere arrival of a character. Nor can the entrance of Mephistopheles into Faust's room be the exciting moment. Nor can either the stimulating prophecies of the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* or the melodramatic appearance of the Ghost in *Hamlet* be considered as the beginning of the action proper of the drama.

More consistent is Freytag when, on p. 124, he affirms that the exciting force "always forms the transition from the introduction to the ascending action." Again, however, his illustrations are not all apt, for the rescue of Baumgarten in *Tell* cannot be merely an act of will; it is the accomplishment of his determination, a stage in the rise of the Tell-action. On another page (197), Freytag calls Baumgarten's flight and rescue the exciting force.

Other illustrations of the exciting force show plainly that Freytag had no very clear idea of what such a force is. They make it evident that at one time he is thinking more of the scenic nature of the force than of its volitional aspect. Such physical actions as the arrival of Beaumarchais or Theseus, the rescue of Baumgarten, the appearance of a ghost, the utterances of the oracles, the reading of a list of names, the boxing of ears, the meeting of generals, are often called by Freytag and others the exciting force of the drama, though they may precede or follow, frequently by more than one scene, the real beginning of the dramatic action. Evidently the exciting force cannot be two entirely different things at one and the same time.

Professor Price, in his *Technique of the Drama*, p. 72, puts the beginning of the action in Act I, immediately after the introduction. With Price as with Freytag, there is a tendency to confuse the initiating moment with one of the causes of the action, which should belong, of course, to the introduction or exposition. Quite clear and definite, however, are Price's words on page 90:

"It is when issue is joined that the action really begins. . . . The moment the hero of the play or his following, or the opposing force, announces a purpose, the mechanism is set in motion. . . . It must occur in every first act, and is usually not distant from the conclusion of it."

Rather definite, but still somewhat contradictory, is a passage from Miss Woodbridge's excellent little book, *The Drama, its Law and its Technique*, p. 81: "The action proper of a play begins with what is called the 'exciting force,' that is, the force which is to change things from their condition of balance or repose, and precipitate the dramatic conflict. . . . Macbeth's meeting with the witches furnishes the exciting force. Here first is suggested to him the thought that afterwards develops into act, in the murders of Duncan and Banquo." But Macbeth's meeting with the witches does not begin the real action of the drama; it is only a part of the exposition, a presentation of one of the causes or occasions or motive forces of the action. The action proper begins when Macbeth says, at the very end of Act first:

"I am settled, and bend up  
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat."

All before this is introductory matter, is preparation for action. The final decision to act is the exciting force.

Following in the track of the preceding authorities Bliss Perry reproduces their errors or contradictions. In his discriminating work, *A Study of Prose Fiction*, p. 53, he says: "Then comes, commonly in the middle or towards the end of the first act of the play, and not far from the beginning of a well-constructed tale, what is called the 'exciting (or 'inciting') force' or 'moment.' Something happens and even though this happening may be apparently insignificant, it begins to affect the entire course of the plot. The ghost appears to Hamlet; the witches confront Macbeth; Cassius talks with Brutus; the clash of interest begins; the lines of party or of faction, of individual ambition or resolve, are suddenly apparent."

The principal difficulty with the above terms and definitions is the fact that the critics have tried in vain to make one definition apply to two

entirely different things. Those who have attempted to give an exhaustive definition with ample and apt illustrations have invariably failed to perceive their inevitable contradictions. They have not seen that there is of necessity a difference between an inciting cause and an exciting force, between the introduction or exposition and the real action of a drama. They have forgotten that the first act of a drama is almost wholly composed of introductory or preparatory matter, the actual beginning of the dramatic action being reserved regularly, in a well-constructed drama, for the last few speeches of the first act or the first lines of the second act. They have failed to discriminate between the nature, the function, and the position of the exciting force. At times they have emphasized the scenic power of the force, as in the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet*, and at other times its position. Some have laid stress on the word 'exciting,' others have been more concerned about the function of the moment.

The solution of the difficulty that I propose to offer is as follows. In the first place, the exciting cause of the dramatic action should be clearly and rigidly separated from the exciting commencement of this action. The first I would call the exciting or inciting cause, and the second the exciting or initial force or moment. For example, in the *Antigone* of Sophocles the exciting cause is Creon's edict that whoever buries the body of Polyneices shall be punished with death; the exciting force is Antigone's resolve to bury her brother. In *Hamlet*, the exciting cause is the appearance and instruction of the Ghost to Hamlet; the exciting force is Hamlet's rather indefinite resolution that, with certain mental reservations, he will avenge the death of his father, ending with these words:

"The time is out of joint: O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right."

In Corneille's *Le Cid*, the exciting cause is the famous 'box on the ears,' the exciting force being Rodrigue's determination to avenge his father on the Count, though the offender be the father of Chimène. In Racine's *Iphigénie*, the exciting cause is the demand of the oracle for a victim of the blood of Helen, the exciting force being Agamemnon's '*Je cède*,' his resolution to sacrifice his

daughter. In the same author's *Esther*, the exciting cause is the edict of the King that the Jews shall be put to death, the exciting force being Esther's resolve to enter the King's presence to intercede for her people, though she should perish in her attempt. In Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, the exciting cause is Dr. Stockman's discovery that the Baths are contaminated; the exciting force is his determination to prepare and publish a report of his discovery. In Schiller's *Robbers*, the exciting cause is the reception of the supposed letter from Karl von Moor's father, the exciting force being Karl's resolve to become Captain of the band of robbers, expressed in these words, "As my soul lives I will be your captain."

I would confine, then, the exciting force or moment strictly to the actual beginning of the dramatic action, eliminating all introductory matter whether causal or explanatory. The function of the exciting force is, therefore, to initiate the action, to start the ball to rolling, to arouse the curiosity and interest of the spectator in the real conflict of opposing forces. At this point the hero, or the principal opposing force, comes forth, after being subjected to various influences from within and without, with his mind definitely made up to accomplish some great purpose. The forming or announcement of this cherished plan is the initiating moment of the conflict, the exciting force of the drama. Thus the nature of this force is psychological, an act of will. Occasionally, however, as in Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*, this resolve takes place off the stage and is made known to the spectators by the physical beginning of the action.

Furthermore, the exciting force is, as a rule, connected directly with the hero or the principal opposing force, who resolves to do something. Electra resolves to avenge her father. Ajax determines to kill himself. In the liberty-action of *Tell* the three Swiss determine to stand together for liberty, in victory or defeat, in life and death. Wallenstein decides to continue his rebellion against the emperor. Mephistopheles resolves to tempt Faust, permission being granted him to test the unsatisfied Doctor. Brutus resolves on the death of Cæsar. The early conversation of Cassius and Brutus is not, as Freytag and Bliss Perry would have us believe, the exciting force

of the drama. The early action of the hero's friends or adherents, as that of Cassius in *Julius Cæsar* and of Nearchus in *Polyeucte*, only leads the hero to determine on doing something. Such action is, then, only preparatory or causal or explanatory, and therefore belongs properly to the exposition or introduction. Finally, in a comedy of intrigue the exciting force is generally the determination of the arch-intriguer to outwit his victim, often his master, as in Molière's *L'Étourdi*.

As to the position of this exciting force, the practice is that it comes almost invariably just before the first appearance of the full chorus in the ancient drama and at the very end of act first in a regularly constructed modern drama of from three to five acts. In *Oedipus King*, just before the entrance of the full chorus, Oedipus declares that he will, at all hazards, discover the murderer of Laius. In *Othello*, the agreement between Iago and Roderigo to separate Othello and Desdemona, occurs at the very end of Act I. In speaking of his resolve to avenge himself on Othello, Iago, in the last words of the Act, says:

"I have 't. It is engender'd. Hell and night  
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light."

The Cid's determination to avenge himself on the Count is expressed in the last lines of the first Act of Corneille's *Le Cid*.

Rarely is the exciting force found in the early scenes of the first Act. It appears in the very beginning of *Richard III*, where the hero, with his mind fully made up as to his plans, declares, "I am determined to prove a villain," and then plunges at once into the action of the drama which is dominated by his personality. In other plays of Shakespeare, as in the histories and romances, which contain a large epic element, the exciting force is usually given at or near the beginning of the first act, employing the traditional method of the Classical epic poems that plunge at once *in medias res*. Thus the remarks of Bliss Perry, quoted above, are more true perhaps of the novel, which is epic in form and spirit, than of the drama.

A few dramas, as Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*, defer the exciting force to the beginning of the second act, in order that the hero may make use of the additional time that passes in the interval

between the first and second acts. With consummate art Shakespeare makes us see that the action is important, concerning not simply individuals but kings and empires, and that this interval of time was employed by Brutus in a most exciting inward conflict :

“ Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream :  
The genius and the mortal instruments  
Are then in council, and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection.”

Now, this ‘first motion’ is an exact definition of the exciting force, which is expressed in Brutus’ words at the beginning of Act II, “Then it must be by his death,” the completion of the hero’s resolve to join and lead the conspiracy against the life of Caesar. Usually this conflict, whether inward or outward, is seen in the introduction, the interval between Acts I and II being devoted to preparation for the carrying out of the resolve which forms the exciting or initiating force of the action ; but in the case of *Julius Caesar* the actual resolution of Brutus is delayed until after this “interim” between the “first motion” and “the acting of a dreadful thing.”

In a Classical drama or a drama with only one action, there is, of course, only one exciting force and its position is regular, being at or near the end of Act I. In romantic dramas, however, there are often several actions—a main action and one or more minor or subordinate actions. Each of these actions has its own exciting force ; but sometimes, as in *Hernani* and *The Robbers*, the exciting force of a sub-action usurps the position usually held by that of the main action, intentionally perhaps misleading the spectators.

JAMES D. BRUNER.

*The University of North Carolina.*

#### A MISINTERPRETED PASSAGE IN GOETHE’S *HERMANN UND DOROTHEA*.

In order to realize the state of affairs presented in the concluding canto of *Hermann und Dorothea*, it should be remembered that when the maiden is

introduced into Hermann’s parental home, all persons are aware of the young man’s real intentions, except Dorothea herself. Thus the father, going straight to the point with his whimsical, self-complacent speech (IX, 78–85) unwittingly brings the uncomfortable situation to a head. Encouraged by the sagacious pastor, Hermann relieves the tension of the moment by confessing his stratagem and declaring his love to Dorothea ; and then the pastor, with his accustomed presence of mind and sureness of judgment, seizes upon the “psychologic” moment and of his own accord proceeds to the rites of betrothal, as follows (243 f.) :

“ Noch einmal sei der goldenen Reifen Bestimmung,  
Fest ein Band zu knüpfen, das völlig gleiche dem alten.  
Dieser Jüngling ist tief von der Liebe zum Mädchen  
durchdrungen,  
Und das Mädchen gesteht, dass auch ihr der Jüngling  
erwünscht ist.  
Also verlob’ ich euch hier und segn’ euch künftigen  
Zeiten,  
Mit dem Willen der Eltern und mit dem Zeugnis des  
Freundes.”

The mercurial apothecary cannot refrain from signalling his felicitations before the ceremony is over (249 f.) :

“ Und es neigte sich gleich mit Segenswünschen der  
Nachbar.  
Aber als der geistliche Herr den goldenen Reif nun  
Steckt’ an die Hand des Mädchens, erblickt’ er den  
anderen  
staunend,  
Den schon Hermann zuvor am Brunnen sorglich be-  
trachtet.  
Und er sagte darauf mit freundlich scherzenden Worten :  
‘ Wie ! du verlobest dich schon zum zweitenmal ? Dass  
nicht der erste  
Bräutigam bei dem Altar sich zeige mit hinderndem  
Einspruch ! ’ ”

Probably the passage would not bother the reader had it not been obfuscated by critical overconscientiousness. For the editors, from Father Düntzer on, are perplexed by the pastor’s astonishment, inasmuch as he knows, or ought to know, all about Dorothea’s former love affair (VI, 186–190). And so they seek for an explanation. Nearly all American editors of *H. u. D.* have dealt with this question.

Says Hewett (p. 209) : “The pastor’s real or feigned surprise has led to the supposition that